

STATEMENT OF JOHN WESSELS, ACTING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, BUSINESS SERVICES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 5978, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL RESOURCES STUDY TO DETERMINE THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF INCLUDING THE BATTLEFIELDS AND RELATED SITES OF THE FIRST AND SECOND BATTLES OF NEWTONIA, MISSOURI, DURING THE CIVIL WAR AS PART OF WILSON'S CREEK NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD OR DESIGNATING THE BATTLEFIELDS AND RELATED SITES AS A SEPARATE UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

September 7, 2006

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 5978, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resources study to determine the suitability and feasibility of including the battlefields and related sites of the First and Second Battles of Newtonia, Missouri, during the Civil War as part of Wilson's Creek National Battlefield or designating the battlefields and related sites as a separate unit of the National Park System. The Department supports H.R. 5978. However, we believe that funding should be directed first toward completing the previously authorized studies. There are currently 29 authorized studies that have not been completed.

H.R. 5978 would authorize the Secretary to carry out a special resource study to determine the national significance of sites in Newton County, Missouri associated with the Civil War. The Secretary would evaluate the national significance of the battlefields and their related sites and analyze the potential impact that their inclusion in the National Park System is likely to have on land within or bordering Wilson's Creek National Battlefield.

A special resource study would provide alternatives for the appropriate way to preserve, to

protect, and to interpret these sites and resources. Those alternatives would include recommendations on whether the area could be included as a new unit of the National Park System, as part of the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, or determine if the Federal government is the most appropriate entity to manage the site. We estimate that the costs of completing this study would be approximately \$250,000 to \$300,000.

Newtonia was the scene of two significant battles in the Civil War, one on September 30, 1862 and the other on October 28, 1864. The battles were fought in and around the town of Newtonia, an area that today retains much of its character from almost a century and a half ago. The September 30, 1862 battle involved Native American soldiers directly fighting each other, and the October 28, 1864 battle was the last Civil War battle fought within the borders of the State of Missouri and the culmination of Confederate Major General Sterling Price's 1864 Missouri Expedition.

Newtonia was important as a centralized location to lead mines and the communities of Mt. Vernon (which housed a Union garrison), Sarcoxie, and Neosho, making it a tempting area for both sides for control of the Spring River and its fertile valley. Confederate Colonel Douglas Cooper had arrived in Newtonia on September 27 and had taken over the area. On September 30 Union troops under General James Blunt appeared before Newtonia and the fighting began by 7:00 a.m. The Federals began driving the enemy away from their positions; but thanks to timely Confederate reinforcements, the Federals had to give way and retreat. As the Union forces were retreating, they received reinforcements and renewed their attack, threatening the enemy right flank. The Union 3rd Indian Battalion was heavily engaged during the attack on the right flank as

were the Confederate 1st Choctaw and Chickasaw Regiment; in fact the two units engaged each other directly in a desperate melee. But once again Confederate reinforcements arrived and pushed the Federals back and into what quickly became an all out retreat. Some Union forces retreated all the way to Sarcoxie, some 10 miles away. Although the Confederates won the battle, they were unable to maintain themselves in the area due to the superior numbers of Union troops, and most retreated into northwest Arkansas.

In the last days of October 1864, Newtonia again took center stage. Confederate Major General Sterling Price had launched his “Missouri Expedition” in September of 1864 in an effort to retake Missouri for the Confederacy. His mission was failing miserably by October of 1864; and after sound defeats at the Battle of Westport on October 21-23 and the Battle of Mine Creek, Kansas on October 25, he was desperately trying to make his way back to Confederate Territory. Major General Price made one last stand at Newtonia on October 28, 1864. Most of his army continued across the Arkansas River into Texas. Troops under the command of General Jo Shelby slowed the Union advance of General James Blunt and held the Union forces at bay until darkness overtook the area and allowed Shelby’s men to join the rest of the comrades in retreating to Texas. Confederate forces would not seriously threaten to cross the Arkansas River and invade Missouri again.

Currently the Newtonia Battlefields Protection Association owns and maintains 25 plus acres of the Battlefields. This includes the Ritchey Mansion and the “Old Newtonia Cemetery” or the “Civil War Cemetery” as it is locally known, with one battle participant, Captain Richard

Christian, buried in it. There are approximately 200 graves, marked only by rough sandstone or field stones, which are almost certainly graves of Confederate dead.

The Newtonia Battlefields Protection Association was instrumental in having the sites of the 1862 and the 1864 battles listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Ritchey Mansion was previously listed on the National Register, and the Association revised that application after they purchased the Mansion in 2002. The Association applied for and received three grants from the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) of the National Park Service. Two of those studies were archeological studies, “Engaged the Enemy Again—An Assessment of the 1862 and 1864 Civil War Battles at Newtonia, Missouri ;”(Fryman 1995) and “Newtonia Battlefields and Archeological Survey” (White Star 1998). Also in 2000, “A Preservation Plan for the Civil War Battlefields of Newtonia, Missouri” was funded by the ABPP and completed by Gray & Pape, Inc.

That concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.